

# UCLA Faculty Association

News and opinion from Dan Mitchell since 2009

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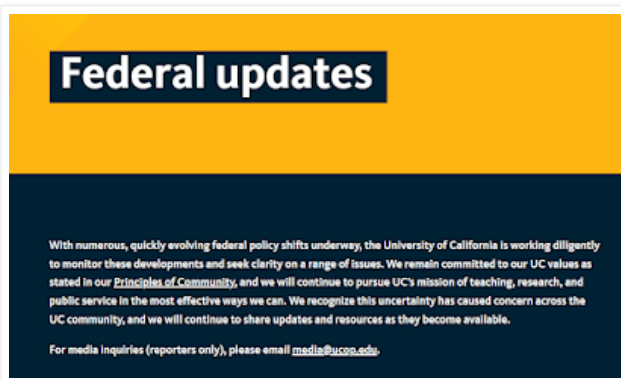
Monday, December 8, 2025

## No News



The UC website - since The Troubles began - featured a section entitled "Federal Updates" which used to have, well, updates.

Nowadays, however, there aren't any:



If you have trouble reading the text above, here is is below:

*With numerous, quickly evolving federal policy shifts underway, the University of California is working diligently to monitor these developments and seek clarity on a range of issues. We remain committed to our UC values as stated in our [Principles of Community](#), and we will continue to pursue UC's mission of teaching, research, and public service in the most effective ways we can. We recognize this uncertainty has caused concern across the UC community, and we will continue to share updates and resources as they become available.*

*For media inquiries (reporters only), please email [media@ucop.edu](mailto:media@ucop.edu).*

Source: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/federal-updates>.

Whether no news is good news, it doesn't say.

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### Topics

## Why folks are nervous

Folks are UCLA are nervous about an effort on campus to consolidate the various local IT systems into a unified arrangement. There are reasons, mainly issues of cybersecurity and compatibility, to have a single system. But the record at UC\* and at UCLA\*\* in converting older systems into new ones has not been great. The Regents are currently suing computer consultants for failures related to its pension payment system.\*\*\* So, the history is in fact one of cost overruns and failure. Thus, it's natural that folks are nervous.



Some of the concern in Murphy Hall seems to be that a single organization just should have a single computer/IT system. But that argument depends heavily on defining "organization." Are not individual schools, for example, organizations? If you took the single-system-for-single-organization argument to its logical end, you could argue that UC is ultimately just an entity within state government and therefore the whole state government, including UC, should have a single system.

As for cybersecurity, is it really obvious that having a single system is best? If someone were to hack into such a hypothetical unified system, there would be access to everything. Is it possible that a more diffuse arrangement has certain advantages? Getting into one of many systems might not provide access to others.

Finally, if you are at point A and imagine that point B would be better, isn't it important to consider the costs of the transition? So, if we had a time machine, maybe we should go back to the beginning and create a unified system rather than the multiple systems that actually were developed. But we don't have a time machine and what is - is.

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\*<https://uclafacultyassociation.blogspot.com/2025/01/a-clue-to-ongoing-mystery.html>.

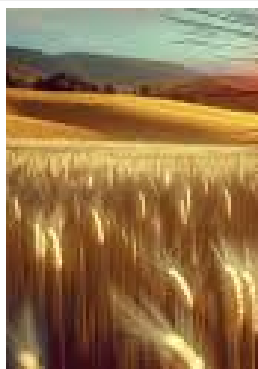
\*\*<https://uclafacultyassociation.blogspot.com/2025/05/do-i-sense-computer-snafu-part-3.html>.

\*\*\*<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/12/04/the-university-of-california-says-it-wants-justice-for-messy-rollout-of-pension-system-contractors-call-it-revenge-00675055>.

## Straws in the Wind - Part 185

From the [NY Times](#): ...*This semester, more than 3,000 students enrolled in a new college of artificial intelligence and cybersecurity at the University of South Florida in Tampa. At the University of California, San Diego, 150 first-year students signed up for a new A.I. major. And the State University of New York at Buffalo created a stand-alone "department of A.I. and society," which is offering new interdisciplinary degrees in fields like "A.I. and policy analysis."*

...*Interest in understanding, using and learning how to build A.I. technologies is soaring, and schools are racing to meet rising student and industry demand. Over the last two years, dozens of U.S. universities and colleges have announced new A.I. departments, majors, minors, courses, interdisciplinary concentrations and other programs.*



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*In 2022, for instance, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology created a major called “A.I. and decision-making.” Students in the program learn to develop A.I. systems and study how technologies like robots interact with humans and the environment. This year, nearly 330 students are enrolled in the program — making A.I. the second-largest major at M.I.T. after computer science...*

Full story at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/01/technology/college-computer-science-ai-boom.html>.

And here's some theme music from Harry Shearer for the new major:

Posted by California Policy Issues at [3:20 AM](#) No comments: 

Labels: MIT, SUNY, U of South Florida, UC-San Diego

## Will Harvard Continue to Lead the Charge? - Part 96



*From the Harvard Crimson: The power to grant or deny tenure is a prerogative that faculty have long held sacred. But at Harvard, the final decisions to shut the door on tenure cases have increasingly been made out of departments' hands — and in direct opposition to the outcome of departmental votes. In a presentation delivered Tuesday to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Nina Zipser, the FAS dean for faculty affairs and planning, reported that the share of internal FAS tenure applications denied at the departmental level has fallen over the past decade.*

*Under former Harvard President Drew G. Faust, who held office from 2013 to 2018, the figure sat*

*at an average of 61 percent. It dropped to 44 percent under Lawrence S. Bacow, who led Harvard through mid-2023. Since then — in the two years encompassing the short-lived presidency of Claudine Gay and the start of Alan S. Garber '76's term — the share has declined even further, to just 30 percent.*

*That means that most candidates whose tenure cases were rejected in the past two years had received approval from a majority of tenured faculty in their departments, only to see the results of the departmental vote overruled by committees or administrators at later stages of the appointment process...*

*Zipser also discussed faculty retirements, which reached a 20-year record high during the 2023-2024 academic year, with 28 retirees.*

Full story at <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/12/3/harvard-tenure/>.

Posted by California Policy Issues at [3:10 AM](#) No comments: 

Labels: Harvard

Sunday, December 7, 2025

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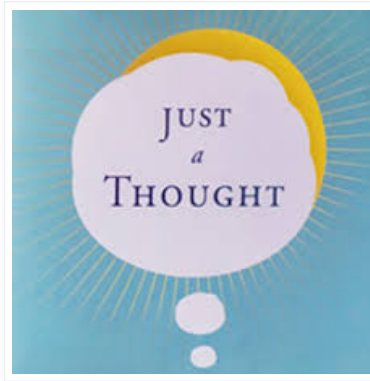
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Subway Work

Straws in the Wind - Part 189

From James Somers, "The Case That A.I. Is Thinking: ChatGPT does not have an inner life. Yet it seems to know what it's talking about," [The New Yorker](#): ...Was ChatGPT mindlessly stringing words together, or did it understand the problem? The answer could teach us something important about understanding itself. "Neuroscientists have to confront this humbling truth," Doris Tsao, a neuroscience professor at the University of California, Berkeley, told me. "The advances in machine learning have taught us more about the essence of intelligence than anything that neuroscience has discovered in the past hundred years."



Tsao is best known for decoding how macaque monkeys perceive faces. Her team learned to predict which neurons would fire when a monkey saw a specific face; even more strikingly, given a pattern of neurons firing, Tsao's team could render the face. Their work built on research into how faces are represented inside A.I. models. These days, her favorite question to ask people is "What is the deepest insight you have gained from ChatGPT?" "My own answer," she said, "is that I think it radically demystifies thinking."

...People in A.I. were skeptical that neural networks were sophisticated enough for real-world tasks, but, as the networks got bigger, they began to solve previously unsolvable problems. People would devote entire dissertations to developing techniques for distinguishing handwritten digits or for recognizing faces in images; then a deep-learning algorithm would digest the underlying data, discover the subtleties of the problem, and make those projects seem obsolete. Deep learning soon conquered speech recognition, translation, image captioning, board games, and even the problem of predicting how proteins will fold.

...Today's leading A.I. models are trained on a large portion of the internet, using a technique called next-token prediction. A model learns by making guesses about what it will read next, then comparing those guesses to whatever actually appears. Wrong guesses inspire changes in the connection strength between the neurons; this is gradient descent. Eventually, the model becomes so good at predicting text that it appears to know things and make sense. So that is something to think about. A group of people sought the secret of how the brain works. As their model grew toward a brain-like size, it started doing things that were thought to require brain-like intelligence. Is it possible that they found what they were looking for?

...Jonathan Cohen, a cognitive neuroscientist at Princeton, emphasized the limitations of A.I., but argued that, in some cases, L.L.M.s seem to mirror one of the largest and most important parts of the human brain. "To a first approximation, your neocortex is your deep-learning mechanism," Cohen said. Humans have a much larger neocortex than other animals, relative to body size, and the species with the largest neocortices—elephants, dolphins, gorillas, chimpanzees, dogs—are among the most intelligent.

...I do not believe that ChatGPT has an inner life, and yet it seems to know what it's talking about. Understanding—having a grasp of what's going on—is an underappreciated kind of thinking, because it's mostly unconscious. Douglas Hofstadter, a professor of cognitive science and comparative literature at Indiana University, likes to say that cognition is recognition... Hofstadter was one of the original A.I. deflationists, and my own skepticism was rooted in his. He wrote that most A.I. research had little to do with real thinking, and when I was in college, in the two-thousands, I agreed with him. There were exceptions. He found the U.C.S.D. group interesting. And he admired the work of a lesser-known Finnish American cognitive scientist, Pentti Kanerva, who noticed some unusual properties in the mathematics of high-dimensional spaces...

Hofstadter realized that Kanerva was describing something like a "seeing as" machine. "Pentti Kanerva's memory model was a revelation for me," he wrote in a foreword to Kanerva's book. "It was the very first piece of research I had ever run across that made me feel I could glimpse the distant goal of understanding how the brain works as a whole." Every kind of thinking—whether Joycean, Proustian, or logical—depends on the relevant thing coming to mind at the right time. It's how we figure out what situation we're in...

...L.L.M.s appear to have a "seeing as" machine at their core. They represent each word with a series of numbers denoting its coordinates—its vector—in a high-dimensional space. In GPT-4, a word vector has thousands of dimensions, which describe its shades of similarity to and difference from every other word. During training, a large language model tweaks a word's coordinates whenever it makes a prediction error; words that appear in texts together are nudged closer in space. This produces an incredibly dense representation of usages and meanings, in which analogy becomes a matter of geometry. In a classic example, if you take the word vector for "Paris," subtract "France," and then add "Italy," the nearest other vector will be

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"Rome." L.L.M.s can "vectorize" an image by encoding what's in it, its mood, even the expressions on people's faces, with enough detail to redraw it in a particular style or to write a paragraph about it.

When [my friend] Max asked ChatGPT to help him out with [a] sprinkler at the park, the model wasn't just spewing text. The photograph of the plumbing was compressed, along with Max's prompt, into a vector that captured its most important features. That vector served as an address for calling up nearby words and concepts. Those ideas, in turn, called up others as the model built up a sense of the situation. It composed its response with those ideas "in mind." ...

Full story at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/11/10/the-case-that-ai-is-thinking>.

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### **Fredric Brown, "Answer" 1954**

Dwan Ev ceremoniously soldered the final connection with gold. The eyes of a dozen television cameras watched him and the subether bore throughout the universe a dozen pictures of what he was doing.

He straightened and nodded to Dwar Reyn, then moved to a position beside the switch that would complete the contact when he threw it. The switch that would connect, all at once, all of the monster computing machines of all the populated planets in the universe -- ninety-six billion planets -- into the supercircuit that would connect them all into one supercalculator, one cybernetics machine that would combine all the knowledge of all the galaxies.

Dwar Reyn spoke briefly to the watching and listening trillions. Then after a moment's silence he said, "Now, Dwar Ev."

Dwar Ev threw the switch. There was a mighty hum, the surge of power from ninety-six billion planets. Lights flashed and quieted along the miles-long panel.

Dwar Ev stepped back and drew a deep breath. "The honor of asking the first question is yours, Dwar Reyn."

"Thank you," said Dwar Reyn. "It shall be a question which no single cybernetics machine has been able to answer."

He turned to face the machine. "Is there a God?"

The mighty voice answered without hesitation, without the clicking of a single relay.

"Yes, *now* there is a God."

Sudden fear flashed on the face of Dwar Ev. He leaped to grab the switch.

A bolt of lightning from the cloudless sky struck him down and fused the switch shut.

Posted by California Policy Issues at [3:30 AM](#) No comments: 

Labels: [Indiana University](#), [miscellaneous](#), [Princeton U](#), [UC-Berkeley](#), [UC-San Diego](#)

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#### **Contributors**

- [California Policy Issues](#)
- [Toby Higbie](#)
- [UCLA Faculty Association](#)

## **Straws in the Wind - Part 184**



From the [NY Times](#): *The University of Chicago was where fun went to die. Tulane University was where you could die from too much fun. Neither place liked its reputation, but in 2016, both felt confident enough in changes on their campuses that they started offering an early decision option for student applicants. Apply by November (or January for the “Early Decision II” option) and get an answer weeks later. You just had to agree to attend if you got in.*



*Within a handful of years, two-thirds of Tulane’s first-year class had taken the deal. The University of Chicago found so much success that it recently added an opportunity to apply even earlier, in some cases before the senior year of high school has even begun. The enrollment chiefs who made this all happen also found success. **According to federal filings from 2023, Chicago’s vice president for enrollment and student advancement, James G. Nondorf, received \$967,000 over a year from the university and “related” organizations. At Northeastern University, the executive vice chancellor and chief enrollment officer, Satyajit Dattagupta, got \$1.079 million in compensation after decamping in 2022 from Tulane, where he had a strong run in a similar role.***

*If you’re the gatekeeper at schools like these, where over a third of the students will pay full price — \$400,000 or so over four years — you earn your keep by landing just a few more of them each year. Miss your number, however, and the shortfall can cascade through four years of revenue shortages. You could also be out of a job. Vice presidents of sales at high-performing organizations make the big bucks, and thousands of teenagers now sign up each year to say Chicago, Northeastern or Tulane is their true love always...*

Full story at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/29/business/tulane-university-chicago-early-decision.html>.

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From [Inside Higher Ed](#): *House Republicans held a hearing [last] Wednesday broadcasting long-standing conservative allegations of a left-wing bias in the small, prestigious Truman Scholarship program. Witnesses called by the GOP said the winners disproportionately espouse causes such as promoting racial justice and fighting climate change—and wind up working for Democrats and left-leaning organizations—while few recipients profess interest in conservative aims.*

*...Rather than counter the allegations, Democrats and their invited witness largely called the proceedings a distraction from the issue of college unaffordability, which they accused the GOP of exacerbating...*

Full story at <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/financial-aid/2025/12/04/house-republicans-accuse-truman-scholarship-liberal-bias>.

Posted by California Policy Issues at [3:20 AM](#) No comments: 

Labels: [admissions](#), [enrollment](#), [Northeastern U](#), [politics](#), [tuition](#), [Tulane](#), [U of Chicago](#)

Saturday, December 6, 2025

## Calimony Money to Burn

For those worried about the budget squeeze, you’ll be glad to know there is money to burn for certain activities:

From the [Mercury News](#): *Cal’s football expenses are soaring following general manager Ron Rivera’s decision to fire coach Justin Wilcox with two years remaining on his contract. In addition to the dead money, the Bears must hire a*



*replacement — Oregon defensive coordinator Tosh Lupoi, a former Cal player, is the heavy favorite — and pay for new assistants and support personnel. All told, the changes likely will cost the Bears in excess of \$35 million.*

**Good thing they will have the cash to cover the transition, courtesy of the University of California.**

**The so-called Calimony subsidy payments headed to Berkeley from UCLA — to the tune of \$30 million over three years — aren't the half of it. Literally. The Bears will receive an additional \$45 million in "bridge" financing from the University of California Office of the President (UCOP) in three annual installments of \$15 million, according to a document obtained by the Hotline through a public records request and supplemental information provided by UCOP.**

*The additional funding was not approved by the UC regents, although they were made aware of it, and had not been widely disclosed. All told, \$75 million is bound to Berkeley in three installments of \$25 million that began in 2024-25 and will continue through the 2026-27 academic year. The cash isn't specifically for football and will be used to support the overall athletic department budget, according to Cal. In response to a request for comment on the additional \$45 million from UCOP, a university spokesperson provided the following statement:*

*"The Berkeley campus appreciates the commitment of the University of California system to preserve and build upon Cal Athletics' tradition of educating student-athletes while enabling them to compete at the highest level of national competition."*

*The Bears have plenty of uses for the influx, over and above the coaching change.*

*Wilcox's buyout is approximately \$11 million, and the Bears likely will spend at least \$20 million on a new coach — a five-year deal at \$4 million annually seems like the minimum outlay — and another \$5 million (minimum) to dismiss current assistants and hire new ones.*

*Also, the athletic department reported a budget shortfall in the 2023-24 fiscal year, with \$120 million in revenue and \$149 million in expenses, according to financial statements reported to the NCAA. Notably, the revenue figure included approximately \$35 million in support from central campus...*

Full story at <https://www.mercurynews.com/2025/12/03/cal-has-more-cash-coming-than-just-ucla-subsidy-for-football-hire-and-everything-else/>.

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